

# An Examination of License Reciprocity for Military Spouses in the State of Missouri

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## Introduction

Marriages between a military service member and civilian are different than marriages between two civilian individuals in many ways. From overseas deployments to frequent moves between posts, these relationships between service members and civilians face additional layers of stress due to the nature of military life. In a time when some question the importance of America maintaining a strong military, it is crucial that steps are taken to ensure the best quality of life for service members and their spouses. One issue that plagues many service members' spouses is license reciprocity: spouses that have a professional license in one state will likely be required to become licensed by each state they move to. This presents a number of issues including, but not limited to financial costs, time commitments, differing requirements by state, and more. Many officials and military leaders are aiming to make professional licenses reciprocal between states for military spouses, and this is a potential solution that would help military spouses transition into a new workforce quicker. Were the State of Missouri to implement policy to automatically provide licensure to a professional that has a license from another state, the state would show the nation that it seeks to be a military-friendly place to call home, even if just for a little while.

## Importance of Spousal Employment

Younger veterans, particularly those who have recently separated or are in transition, have the most in-demand skills, but Missouri only retains approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  of them in the state after their separation. In a recent survey of service members stationed in Missouri by Huffman, Kiger, and Stockdale, 52% reported they were not planning to reside in the state following their military separation, and an additional 18% reported that they were unsure of their plans.<sup>1</sup> In order to convince more veterans to stick around or return to the state after their service, it is important to consider why they are choosing to leave.

Huffman et al. discovered in their survey that the main priority for service members when deciding where to reside once they have separated from the military is employment opportunities.<sup>2</sup> However, it is likely that many service members and their families decide where to live long before they actually separate from the military, and it is important that they view Missouri as an excellent place to work before they ever make a decision about where they want to end up. Since service members work directly for the military, a spouse's experience in the workforce is going to shape that family's perception of the state because ultimately, employment does have a significant effect on quality of life. A federal push for professional license reciprocity policies has highlighted this need across the nation, and these policies are just as important for Missouri as they are for the rest of the country. When a licensed spouse of a service member moves to Missouri and is able to quickly and easily join the workforce, that spouse will earn more money and be spared the hassle of getting a new license. This scenario is ideal, ultimately because the spouse is able to secure employment, but also because it shows that Missouri values service members *and* their spouses.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Huffman, Amy Kiger, and Chris Stockdale, *A Comprehensive Analysis of Missouri's Efforts to Improve the Quality of Life of Military Servicemembers and Their Families*, Missouri Military Preparedness & Enhancement Commission, October 31, 2018. [https://military.ded.mo.gov/sites/military/files/reports/2018\\_P1\\_UCMMO\\_Military\\_Bklt.pdf](https://military.ded.mo.gov/sites/military/files/reports/2018_P1_UCMMO_Military_Bklt.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Huffman, Amy Kiger, and Chris Stockdale, *A Comprehensive Analysis*.

The military's Office of People Analytics (OPA) conducted a national survey in 2017 that asked spouses of service members about their employment and found some dismal results. The survey, called the *2017 Survey of Active Duty Spouses (2017 ADSS)*, showed the following:

- Out of all active-duty military spouses, 29% are unemployed
- For those who are employed, 40% of them said it took 7 months or more to get a job after their last move
- From the spouses who have experienced a move, 29% of them reported they acquired a new professional license after their last relocation<sup>3</sup>

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported the U.S. unemployment rate as 3.5% in November 2019, so there is quite a large difference between the national unemployment rate and the unemployment rate of active-duty military spouses.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the *2017 ADSS* also showed that “Levels of *Distress* on the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-4) were significantly higher in 2017 compared to 2015.”<sup>5</sup> Of course, military spouses play a very important role in the military world: they support their spouses through their time in the service, meeting emotional needs and providing companionship. Thus, it is imperative that government officials do what they can to ensure that spouses themselves feel supported and have opportunities to succeed in their personal lives. License reciprocity agreements could be one way to do that, if states will implement them.

### **Economic Impact on Missouri**

Per data from 2018, there are 7,436 spouses of active duty service members living in the State of Missouri, and only 4,536 (61 percent) of them were in the **workforce** (the term “workforce” encompasses both those who are employed *and* unemployed).<sup>6</sup> This means that 2,900 (39 percent) spouses were not actively looking for employment due to various reasons. When one is not employed or actively seeking employment, they are missing out on earning a salary, and without a salary, they cannot contribute to the state economy. The average annual income for an employee in the state during 2018 was \$46,460, and when nearly 3,000 spouses are not actively involved in the workforce, the state will see less revenue than what it could see if some of those spouses joined the workforce.<sup>7</sup> The surveys above did not list potential reasons the respondents had for not being involved in the workplace—and there could be many of them—but that also means that there is simply no data to show how many of these individuals chose to forgo finding a job due to unique barriers they face as a military spouse. One of the barriers to employment that may lead to a spouse being unemployed (or not searching for employment) is that states have different requirements for licensed professionals, making it difficult to transfer a license from one state to another. Plus, vague language used in state legislation, such as “may” and “shall,” prevents these laws from being

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<sup>3</sup> Malikah Dorvil, *2017 Survey of Active Duty Spouses (2017 ADSS)*, Military OneSource, 2017, <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/Survey-Active-Duty-Spouses-2017-Overview-Briefing-MSO.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> “Employment Situation – November 2019,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empstat.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Malikah Dorvil, *2017 Survey of Active Duty Spouses (2017 ADSS)*.

<sup>6</sup> Defense Eligibility Enrollment Reporting System, Data as of October 25, 2018; Malikah Dorvil, *2017 Survey of Active Duty Spouses (2017 ADSS)*, Military OneSource, 2017, <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/Survey-Active-Duty-Spouses-2017-Overview-Briefing-MSO.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> “Missouri – May 2018 OES State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates.” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019. [https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_mo.htm#00-0000](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_mo.htm#00-0000).

fully implemented.<sup>8</sup> The paragraphs below go more in depth on some of the barriers posed by license reciprocity agreements.

## **Current State of License Reciprocity Agreements**

License reciprocity agreements are not a new thing. In fact, over half of the states have agreements in place to help military spouses. Each state has its own rules about license reciprocity, and less than half the states offer *full* reciprocity for military spouses. According to the Veterans' Employment & Training Service within the US Department of Labor, the states have many different laws and policies in place currently regarding military spouse licensure:

- a. 15 states recognize military spouse licenses (full reciprocity)
- b. 24 states recognize military spouse licenses if home state has equivalent training (Missouri is included in this group)
- c. 6 states "may" choose to recognize military spouse licenses (up to each individual license entity)
- d. 4 states have processes that exclude recognition of military spouse licenses for many professions
- e. 1 state does not recognize military spouse licenses<sup>9</sup>

Missouri falls into the category of states with laws that recognize military spouse licenses but licensing entities are charged with determining whether the "home" state license has equivalent training and other requirements.

### **State Law**

According to 324.008, RSMo, spouses of active duty service members may obtain a temporary courtesy license from any state agency or professional licensing board established under state law. The statute requires that rules establishing criteria for the issuance of a temporary license to military spouses be created and promulgated by each agency or professional licensing board. Temporary licenses may be issued to the spouse by providing the appropriate licensing entity the following:

- A. A completed application form;
- B. A non-refundable application fee, as established by the licensing entity;
- C. Verification sent directly to the appropriate entity from the state, district, or territory in which the applicant holds a current and active license that the applicant holds a current and active license;
- D. Proof that the applicant has engaged in active practice in the state, district, or territory in which the applicant is currently licensed for at least (2) years in the last (5) years immediately preceding the application;
- E. Verification sent directly to the appropriate entity from the state, district, or territory in which the applicant has ever been licensed verifying that --
  - a. The applicant is in good standing at the time of licensure;

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<sup>8</sup> Amanda Winters, Rachael Stephens, and Jennifer Schultz, "Barriers to Work: Veterans and Military Spouses," National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/barriers-to-work-veterans-and-military-spouses.aspx>.

<sup>9</sup> "Military Spouse Interstate License Recognition Options," Veterans' Employment & Training Service, 2019, <https://www.veterans.gov/milspouses/>.

- b. The applicant has not committed an act in any jurisdiction where the applicant has been licensed that would have constituted grounds for the refusal, revocation, or suspension of a license at the time it was committed;
- c. The applicant has not been disciplined by any licensing or credentialing entity in another jurisdiction and is not the subject of an unresolved complaint, review procedure, or disciplinary proceeding by a licensing or credentialing entity in another jurisdiction;
- F. If the licensing entity is unable to determine if the licensing requirements in the state, district, or territory in which the applicant is licensed is equivalent to Missouri's, the applicant will submit documentation regarding the license requirement equivalency;
- G. The licensing entity may request additional information needed to determine the eligibility for a temporary courtesy license.<sup>10</sup>

While the temporary courtesy license is initially only valid for 180 days, the temporary license-holder may submit a written request for a 180-day extension so long as the basic requirements for the license are still met and the license-holder is actively practicing in the state.<sup>11</sup> Some professions, such as teaching, do have full reciprocity agreements already, and, most of the time, the process of getting a certificate in Missouri just requires submitting an application and a few documents, plus passing a background check.<sup>12</sup> Agreements like this one are much more beneficial to spouses since they would not have to worry about getting their license renewed for some time.

324.008, RSMo also explicitly mandates that all agencies and professional boards in Missouri create and promulgate rules relating to license reciprocity for military spouses.<sup>13</sup> In reality, this task is a work in progress. While many professional licensing boards already have some language regarding license reciprocity written into their rules and statutes, others fail to include any information regarding how to obtain a temporary license. Fortunately, there are some states that can serve as a model for future legislation that focuses on this issue in Missouri.

#### *License Reciprocity Laws in Other States*

As stated above, about half of the United States has laws in place regarding license reciprocity, and some states currently have laws in place that are more beneficial to military spouses than the laws that Missouri has in place. Colorado, for example, has a law that allows most professionals who move to the state with their Active Duty spouse to obtain a license that will last them a year before they have to acquire a state license.<sup>14</sup> Texas, on the other hand, allows military spouses with a license in another state to practice in Texas for *three* years after the state confirms their licensure and verifies they are in good-standing in the other jurisdiction.<sup>15</sup> If a service member were to be given the option of moving to Missouri or Texas (and we will assume for the sake of this argument that the service member has a spouse with a professional license), that service member is likely going to choose Texas since his/her spouse would be able to quickly enter the workforce and not

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<sup>10</sup> Missouri Revised Statutes: Mo. Rev. Stat. § 324.008 (2011).

<sup>11</sup> Missouri Revised Statutes: Mo. Rev. Stat. § 324.008 (2011).

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Stash, email to Margery Tanner, December 9, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Missouri Revised Statutes: Mo. Rev. Stat. § 324.008 (2011).

<sup>14</sup> “Relocated Spouse Licensure,” Military & Veterans Programs, 2019, <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dora-military/relocated-spouse-licensure>.

<sup>15</sup> “Military Spouses License Transfer Options: Texas Law,” Veterans’ Employment & Training Service, 2019, <https://www.veterans.gov/milspouses/state-laws/TEXAS.pdf>.

have to worry about their license for a couple of years. If Missouri wants to be a more military-friendly state, legislative and administrative actions need to be taken to get the state up to par on this issue.

## **Conclusion**

Service members and their spouses are often forced to make sacrifices throughout the members' time in Active Duty. Oftentimes, spouses must give up their jobs due to moving around frequently, and many spouses find that having a professional license can be a source of stress when it comes time to move again. Fortunately, many states across the nation are taking notice of this and implementing laws that make it easier for a spouse to transfer their license from one state to another. Missouri does have some laws regarding professional license reciprocation in place, but they do not always provide much benefit for the spouse due to expiration dates and lengthy application processes. States like Colorado and Texas do things a bit differently and could serve as models for which to build further legislation. When a service member and their spouse comes to Missouri, laws need to be in place to make the transition as smooth as possible for the family. Doing so shows that Missouri cares about the wellbeing of service members and their spouses, and these families may be more likely to reside here after their service is up. After all, Missouri is the "Show-Me" state, and this is the perfect opportunity for the state to show the nation that its citizens and government appreciate the countless sacrifices military families make.

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